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PROGRAM CNN Headline News

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SUBJECT Fort Huachuca

JIM WILKERSON: The federal government is apparently spending millions of dollars turning Fort Huachuca, Arizona into a front-line base for US operations in Central America.

Here's an exclusive CNN report from Joe Trento.

JOE TRENTO: More than a hundred years ago the US Cavalry fought Geronimo at Fort Huachuca. Now, the largely forgotten second-line post is getting Washington's attention again. CNN has learned from Senate Intelligence Committee and CIA officials, who asked that they not be identified, that this historic post will be the intelligence operation center for the anticipated covert war in Central America.

Military officials at the post will officially confirm nothing. Yet, a new \$30 million, 12,000-foot long runway is being constructed at the post airfield. That runway is capable of handling the largest troop transport planes in the world.

To the residents around the fort, the increased activity is a mystery. Coincidentally, the town of Sierra Vista is enjoying a boom. Homes that would normally sell for \$35,000 in nearby communities are commanding prices of a hundred thousand and more in this desert town. One realtor said that in recent months 27 FBI and CIA agents have purchased homes in this town of 28,000.

Sierra Vista now has the second highest income of any Arizona community. Town manager Michael Boyer welcomes the boom but has no illusions about what it could mean to Sierra Vista.

TOWN MANAGER MICHAEL BOYER: I would expect that Fort

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Huachuca would be one of several ideal locations to defense that activity in Latin South American.

TRENTO: The Army claims that the 12,000-foot runway and other improvements being made at the post are coincidental. The biggest change in the economy of Sierra Vista is the highly paid photo interpreter comparative [?] and other intelligence experts being hired by firms like TRW and Mantech [?] both major CIA contractors.

For the Residents of Sierra Vista, the mystery of Fort Huachuca has been a bonanza. But how the rest of the country feels about the Pentagon and intelligence community remains to be seen.

This is Joe Trento, CNN, on special assignment.